



Policy Roundtable for Child Care

222 South Hill Street, Fifth Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90012
Phone: (213) 974-4103 • Fax: (213) 217-5106 • www.lacountychildcare.org

October 12, 2006

To: Mayor Michael D. Antonovich
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe

From: Matt Rezvani 
Chair

CHILD CARE QUALITY RATING SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

On June 7, 2006, your Board adopted a motion by Supervisor Knabe, directing the Policy Roundtable for Child Care to develop a detailed implementation plan for a child care quality rating system. This document and its attachments serve as the Roundtable's response to that directive.

The Policy Roundtable for Child Care is keenly aware of the growing significance of child care and development services in Los Angeles County. In 1999, the National Center for Economic Development and Law estimated that the child care industry in Los Angeles County generated nearly \$1.4 billion annually. Since that report was prepared, the number of licensed child care centers has increased by 19 percent and the number of family child care homes has nearly doubled. County departments are currently administering over \$116 million in child care subsidies for very low income families, and families where the children have been identified as at-risk of abuse or neglect. Despite these very considerable financial investments, there is little information available to parents or governments on the quality of the care being provided.

Even more important than the economic implications of child care services, are the research findings that high quality child care services can produce positive outcomes which participants carry into adulthood. Unfortunately, various local assessments have revealed

Carolina Alvarez
Maria Callx
Nancy Carter
Duane C. Dennis
Ann E. Franzen
Barbara I. Gutierrez

Carollee Howes, Ph.D.
Jan Isenberg
Sheri Lewis
Jacquelyn McCroskey, D.S.W.
Joan McGowan



Terri Chew Nishimura, MA, OTR/L
Matt Rezvani
Ariene Rhine
Connie Russell
Lari Sheehan

Peggy Sisson
Esther A. Torrez
John Wicker
Robert A. Wiltse
Ruth M. Yoon

that only a small portion of existing services are of sufficient quality to produce these outcomes. The Policy Roundtable for Child Care is committed to helping families make informed decisions regarding their child care choices.

Over the past three years, the Policy Roundtable for Child Care has worked with a variety of stakeholders to develop the Steps to Excellence Program (STEP), a child care quality rating system. These stakeholders include the Child Care Planning Committee; representatives of Los Angeles Universal Preschool; Los Angeles Unified School District, Early Education Division; University of California, Los Angeles – Center for Improving Child Care Quality; RAND; Community Care Licensing; a number of local family child care associations; staff of the First 5 LA Commission; Professional Association for Childhood Education; Early Identification and Inclusion Committee; and various County departments. In addition, during the spring of 2006, the Roundtable hosted a series of three seminars to increase the child care provider community's understanding of the assessment tools used by STEP. Approximately 75 child care practitioners participated in these seminars. The thoughtful comments and suggestions made by these stakeholders have been incorporated into the program design.

Steps to Excellence Program

The purpose of STEP is to:

- Provide parents, including those receiving child care subsidies from County departments, with clear, concise information on the quality of individual child care settings,
- Distinguish programs that are meeting higher program standards,
- Create incentives for programs to achieve and maintain higher program standards,
- Build a case for linking reimbursement rates to program quality,
- Provide benchmarks to determine if the quality of care in individual programs or communities is improving over time, and
- Inform County departments about the quality of care being purchased with County administered subsidies, estimated at more that \$116 million per year.

The STEP rating instrument addresses six areas:

- Regulatory Compliance
- Teacher/Child Relationships
- Learning Environment
- Identification and Inclusion of Children with Special Needs
- Qualifications and Working Conditions
- Family Community

The attached implementation plan offers an overview of quality rating systems and related research, as well as a detailed discussion of the STEP components, pilot communities, and implementation costs.

Stated briefly, STEP standards are research based, or in the more innovative components, based on best practices which lead to positive outcomes for young children. As proposed, participation in STEP will be voluntary, including both child care centers and family child care homes. So as to reduce the administrative burden of participating in the program, STEP is aligned with current licensing standards, major accreditation programs, and various funding sources. STEP is designed to involve all interested participants and to promote incremental improvements in program quality. These "guiding principals" are discussed in detail, beginning on page 6 of the implementation plan.

Proposed Pilot Sites

The Roundtable is proposing that STEP be piloted and evaluated between 2007 and 2010. The following communities have been identified because of their child care infrastructure and readiness to participate in a child care quality initiative:

- Inglewood
- Long Beach
- Palmdale
- Pomona

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- Pasadena, and
- Santa Monica

In addition, the Roundtable is eager to work with the emerging Prevention Initiative. We understand that Florence/Firestone, Wilmington, Pacoima/Arleta, and a portion of Palmdale are possible sites for that program.

Program Costs

Program costs to implement the STEP pilot range from \$583,000 in year 1 to \$688,000 in year 3. These costs will include on-site observations of at least 300 child care settings per year, incentives for programs to participate in STEP, training and coaching so that programs can make and sustain improvements. Year 3 will be devoted to follow-up observations and evaluation of the impact of the program.

The Office of Child Care is prepared to commit \$213,000 per year in staff and basic operations. The Roundtable has been investigating a variety of potential funding sources and programmatic partnerships. With your Board's endorsement of the pilot phase of STEP, the Roundtable will be positioned to finalize these commitments.

MR:KMS:aa

Attachments

c: David Janssen, Chief Administrative Officer
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
County Counsel